

## Jeffords brings class to clashing committee

December 7, 2006

With elegance and grace, Sen. Jim Jeffords bade farewell to his colleagues on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee on Wednesday by summoning images of the home in Vermont to which he will be retiring.

"I'm going home," Jeffords said simply. "... My home is on the west side of Killington Peak in the small village of Shrewsbury, Vermont. The snow comes early there. I've filled the woodshed for the winter. My snowshoes hang on the hook in the shed. Hopefully, I'll get out to see the birches covered in snow next week. I miss my home."

Jeffords' moving description of his mountain home broke the tension in the Washington committee room where senators were discussing the contentious issue of global warming. It was a touching moment, and members responded to Jeffords with their own tributes and memories of his work on the Environment and Public Works Committee, of which he had been chairman for a time and was most recently the ranking minority member.

Jeffords, a strong environmentalist who has fought to reduce industrial pollution and has repeatedly clashed with the Bush administration over environmental rollbacks, did not let Wednesday's moment pass as merely ceremonial. He made pointed comments about global warming and the work that lies ahead on the issue.

"As for the topic at hand, global warming, I can only say that I am sorry that I was not able to do more to change the minds of the few skeptics that remain in our nation," Jeffords said. "The climate is warming, it is due to human activity, and only a change in human behavior will ensure that my grandson, Patton Henry Jeffords, will not suffer the consequences."

One of those global warming skeptics is Sen. James Inhofe, R-Oklahoma, the outgoing chairman of the Environment and Public Works Committee. He blames the media for being alarmist about global warming.

Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-California, who takes over as chairwoman of the committee in January, puts global warming at the top of her agenda. She considers it a "potential crisis of a magnitude we've never seen," she told the Associated Press on Tuesday. She was among senators who stood with Jeffords in July when he introduced legislation to reduce greenhouse gas pollution blamed for climate change.

After giving his matter-of-fact assessment of global warming Wednesday, Jeffords saluted Boxer as a "strong and courageous leader." He also gave a nod to Senator-elect Bernie Sanders, who will be a member of this important committee.

Jeffords signaled a hope that many Vermonters share -- that the environment will receive a heightened level of attention with a new Congress. Boxer, in her interview with AP, promised "a sea change" in the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee under her leadership. "Any kind of weakening of environmental laws or secrecy or changes in the dead of night, it's over," she said. "We're going to for once, finally, make this committee an environment committee, not an anti-environment committee."

Jeffords left the committee with this endorsement of Boxer: "I will be watching from my quiet mountain retreat, and praying that under your leadership this committee will continue to be as great tomorrow as it has been in the past."

With that, the senator quoted Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," and the promise of "miles to go before I sleep."

As Jeffords finishes his last days in Congress after 32 years, Vermonters will reflect and appreciate the miles and miles that the senator has logged on behalf of the state of Vermont.